

Asian Delegation at COP 8 – Media Event Report back

The Asian delegation at COP8 is made up of grassroots organisations from India- Occupational Health Environment Network of India (OHENI), Indonesia -Local Initiative on OSH (LION), Vietnam Ban Asbestos Network (VN BAN), Vietnam. The delegation is supported by – Asian Ban Asbestos Network (ABAN), Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC), Union Aid Abroad APHEDA, Rotterdam Convention Alliance (ROCA), International Ban Asbestos Secretariat (IBAS) and Solidar Suisse.

The delegation participated in a media event on the morning of May 2 at 9:30 am, held outside the conference venue organised by the Global Asbestos Action Alliance, which was followed by handing the petition of 7,000 signatories from around the world to the President of the COP Rotterdam Convention.

Philip Hazelton from APHEDA introduced the media event and warned of a convention in crisis, as the veto by a small number of countries continues with listing chrysotile among other chemicals on the convention. He expressed the importance of the proposal put forward by 12 African countries to reform Article 22 of the Rotterdam Convention that is aimed at 'democratising' the decision-making process and the need for listing Asbestos under the Annex III of the Convention.

Representatives from the global trade union movement spoke about the dangers of asbestos, a known carcinogen that has caused death and destruction in many countries and yet continues to be consumed in Asia and developing nations of Africa and Latin America. They highlighted the grave problems that persisted in the Rotterdam convention where a few countries are blocking the listing taking away the democratic right of user countries to know about the hazards the substance possess. Andrew Dettmer from Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and IndustriALL, Fiona Murie from The Building and Wood workers International (BWI), Sari Saarinen from the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) spoke to support the listing of asbestos under Annex III of the Convention.

The media and those present at the press conference then listened to a powerful testimony from Siti Kristina a victim of asbestos related disease gave a testimony about exposure to asbestos while she worked at a factory in a asbestos textile factory in Indonesia. She worked in the factory for 23 years and then she fell sick. She has been diagnosed with asbestosis. Rajendra Pevekar who is a victim of secondary exposure of asbestos spoke next as his father worked as a sweeper at the asbestos factory. He came home and his clothes were full of asbestos dust and fibres therefore exposing members of his family to asbestos. Both Rajendra and his mother are now victims of asbestos related cancer.

Jagdish Patel from OEHNI, expressed concern about the continued use of asbestos in India, which continues to be one of the largest importers of asbestos globally exposing millions to the risk of asbestos exposure. Absence of proper diagnosis does not reflect the true magnitude of the problem since majority of Asbestos Related Disease cases remain undiagnosed. He urged the Indian government to take the step in right direction by both listing the Asbestos on the Annex III and support the amendment of the Article 22.

The ABAN network is led by the Victims (both occupational and environmental) and is comprised of trade unions, labour and other human rights organisations in more than 16 Asian countries. It recognizes Asia as a flashpoint for Asbestos Epidemic considering its continued use. ABAN aims towards complete elimination of Asbestos Related Diseases in Asia, and listing of asbestos in Annex III is a major step towards that.

Prepared by

Omana George, Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC)